

## Dragonshards Heirs of Dhakaan

By Keith Baker



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*"The Crown of Lhesh Dhakaan..." Halas whispered. He'd been hunting the relic for months, and now it lay before him. He moved forward, reaching toward the priceless treasure.*

*"Defile the crown with your touch, and I will make you eat your fingers." The voice was soft yet harsh, filled with a smoky music. Halas spun around with his blade already in hand. The speaker was a hobgoblin female dressed in black leather armor with silver studs. A massive bugbear towered over her, brandishing a great flail. To the side, Halas noted a flash of motion and spotted a second hobgoblin, dressed in a finely-crafted suit of black platemail that seemed to blend into the shadows. That warrior wielded a long chain studded with razor-sharp spikes, and before Halas could react, the chain wrapped around his blade. A moment later, he was disarmed.*

*The hobgoblin woman lifted the crown and turned to Halas. "This circlet is older than your race, half-elf. It is the legacy of my people, a sign of our dominion over Khorvaire. The time has come for it to be worn once more."*

The **Eberron Campaign Setting Book** provides information about 28 organizations that play a role in the world. Many more are mentioned in passing: the Ashbound druids, the Cabinet of Faces, and the Trust of Zilargo, to name just three. In time, each of these groups will be addressed in *Dragonshards*, providing you with greater insight into the forces that shape the world. This week we examine a powerful force hiding in the shadows of Darguun: The Heirs of Dhakaan.

### History

The Empire of Dhakaan was built on a foundation of martial skill. For thousands of years it dominated Khorvaire, until the coming of the Daelkyr. For all of their skill, the Dhakaani goblinoids could not stand against the might and madness of the Lords of Xoriat. By the time the Gatekeeper druids bound the Daelkyr and their servants in the depths of Khyber, the empire was a shadow of its former glory. Over the course of millennia it collapsed into savagery, and by the time humanity arrived on Khorvaire, all that was left of the empire was ruins.

Or so it seemed. As the empire crumbled, a few of the greatest generals and leaders took their clans into hiding, determined to preserve the knowledge of the Dhakaani through the darkness they saw coming.

With the rise of Darguun, the clans have emerged once more. If they united behind a single ruler, the Dhakaani clans could easily unseat the Lhesh Haruuc, and if they conquered Darguun, the Dhakaani could pose a threat to the other nations of Khorvaire.

There is one huge obstacle -- none of the clans agree who should be emperor. Who is the true heir of Dhakaan? This issue has led to endless conflicts between the modern-day Dhakaani clans that so far have kept them from posing a threat to the wider world.

One of the major differences between the Dhakaani and the other goblinoids of Khorvaire is the degree of interracial cooperation within a clan. Among the Ghaal'dar and the Marguul, the strong rule the weak. Leadership

is founded on fear, and the weaker races hate the stronger tyrants.

Among the Dhakaani goblinoids, this is not the case. Each species has a role to serve in society, and each embraces this role. The hobgoblins rule not through force of arms but because the goblins and bugbears respect their ability to maintain structure and discipline. The strength of the bugbears is turned against the enemies of the clan. These racial roles are examined below.

## Dhakaani Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins have always formed the foundation of Dhakaani society, from its beginnings to the present day. They are the most disciplined of the goblinoids, both in battle and in court. The hobgoblins rule Dhakaani society, and their power is rarely contested; their leadership skills have been proven over the centuries so that the bugbears and goblins accept their respective roles in society.

Hobgoblin soldiers receive highly specialized training to serve as infantry, archers, or cavalry. The typical Dhakaani soldier is a 2nd level fighter, and all of his feats will be focused on his military specialty. An archer will have Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, and either Far Shot or Rapid Shot. A cavalry trooper will possess Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, and either Trample or Spirited Charge. The feats of an infantry soldier vary based on attribute scores. The fighting style of the Dhakaani infantry emphasizes speed over strength, so Power Attack and its related feats are rarely seen. Common feats include Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Dodge, Mobility, and Weapon Focus. Elite soldiers are renowned for their use of Spring Attack and Whirlwind Strike. The Dhakaani are also known for their use of chain weapons -- flails and spiked chains. Chain masters enjoy displaying their skills with trip and disarm attacks.



A Dhakaani army is both tightly structured and surprisingly flexible. The military is based around small units of infantry that can quickly adapt tactics and formations to evolving combat conditions. Hobgoblins are trained to work together, using techniques like Aid Another and flanking to maximize their effectiveness against powerful opponents. Dhakaani hobgoblins do not adhere to any sort of code of honor in battle, nor do they seek glory like the bugbear berserkers. A hobgoblin soldier takes pride in his skills but in battle his only goal is to achieve an objective as quickly and efficiently as possible, whether it is killing the enemy, seizing a gate, or scouting a location.

While there are a few exceptions in folklore, military service is traditionally seen as a role for male hobgoblins. Females, however, have many important roles in society. The most common form of magic among the Dhakaani is that of the bard, and this talent typically manifests only among the females of the clans. Dhakaani bards are known as *duur'kala*, "dirge singers"; they are treasured both for their abilities to inspire troops and to perform healing magic. The *duur'kala* are the spiritual leaders of the Dhakaani. They use tales of past glory and ancestral deeds to bind communities together and inspire them to a greater future.

Alchemy, healing, and diplomacy are also seen as female arts; the male hobgoblins fight battles, and the females heal the wounds, both physical and political. While bardic talent is very rare, many female hobgoblins have levels in expert, reflecting intense training in these advanced arts.

## Dhakaani Bugbears

From an early age, bugbears are raised to think of themselves as the heroes and martyrs of Dhakaani civilization. They are taught to believe that their strength is the single greatest weapon of the Empire. Most are eager to prove their mettle and worth in battle.

Virtually all adult bugbears, both male and female, are barbarians of at least 1st level. Dhakaani barbarians are not stereotypical savages; instead, the barbarian class represents a specialized form of combat training, with the Rage ability reflecting a consciously cultivated state of battle fury. In combat, bugbear barbarians serve as skirmishers and shock troops, smashing into the ranks of their enemies and using their immense strength to scatter and break formations while the strictly disciplined hobgoblin ranks move up behind them. The favored class of the Dhakaani bugbear is barbarian.

## Dhakaani Goblins

With their prolific rate of reproduction, goblins form the largest segment of any Dhakaani community. Dhakaani goblins receive far more respect than their counterparts in other goblinoid cultures; most fill the roles of peasants and tradesmen, performing noncombat tasks that support the hobgoblin and bugbear soldiers. Recently, a few goblins have explored the modern arts of arcane magic and artifice, especially among the Kech Volaar clan (see page 154 of the **Eberron Campaign Setting**). These goblin wizards and artificers are slowly winning respect among the clans and becoming an important part of the culture.

Two Dhakaani clans are formed entirely of goblins. Both are renowned for their impressive skills. The *taarka'khash* ("silent wolves") is a corps of goblin scouts trained to provide intelligence in the field during military operations; taarka'khash scouts take rogue and ranger levels. The *shaarat'khash* ("silent blades") are an elite order of spies and assassins. The shaarat'khash have long practiced a martial art designed to transform an unarmed goblin into a living weapon. As a result, shaarat'khash goblins pursue both rogue and monk levels, using the Monastic Training feat. By ancient tradition, the Silent Clans do not take sides in any conflict. Instead, they act as mercenaries, providing their services to all sides and fighting their brothers when they face one another on the battlefield. This reputation for complete impartiality and reliability has kept the khash alive for thousands of years. Its own clan will execute a goblin that betrays the secrets of a client. Generally speaking, one must be born into a khash clan to learn its ways, but on rare occasions skilled goblins from other clans have gained admission to one of the Silent Clans.

## Using the Heirs of Dhakaan

The Heirs of Dhakaan have two primary roles in an Eberron campaign. The first is as a source of goblinoid opponents that can provide unexpected challenges for high-level adventurers. Parties that think of goblinoids as pushovers are in for a surprise when they encounter the Dhakaani; these goblinoids can have significant PC class levels and excellent equipment, and they should respond with the finest tactics that the DM could devise. Just like the Lord of Blades, Dhakaani NPCs scale up in power as the adventurers rise in skill; Tuura Dhakaan and Ruus Dhakaan are heroes of their people and will become more powerful in time. Adventurers may encounter Dhakaani treasure hunters seeking to reclaim the relics of their empire. If the DM wishes, he can play up the fact that these artifacts, by rights, do belong to the Dhakaani. An adventurer who lays claim to the *Breastplate of Khamvuul Norek* and refuses to relinquish it to the Heirs of Dhakaan is, from their perspective, a common grave robber.

Another way to use the Heirs of Dhakaan is to have the PCs become actively involved in the struggles between

the Dhakaani clans. If the Kech Sharaat gain power over the other clans, they will eventually pose a threat to the people of the Five Nations. Perhaps the Kech Volaar are more reasonable, and the party needs to help Tuura Dhakaan deal with her enemies to maintain the balance of power. Perhaps Lhesh Haruuc of Darguun hires the party; the hobgoblin king wants the characters to weaken all of the Dhakaani clans, to prevent them from undermining his newborn nation.

The Dhakaani clans are also a good source of goblinoid player characters. A member of the Kech Volaar might join with a party of humans and demihumans in hope of finding lost Dhakaani treasures to return to her clan. For a change of pace, the players could make an entire party of goblinoids. Why not see what it's like to play on the other side for a while?

Because of their emphasis on the arts of war, the Heirs of Dhakaan can be a good way to bring exotic prestige classes into Eberron. Perhaps the sharaat'khesh goblins use the ninja class, while the most gifted swordsmen of the Kech Sharaat follow a tradition similar to that of the samurai. Exotic weapon masters, kensai, bladesingers, marshals, and tactical soldiers could all find a place in the clans. If a nongoblinoid character wants to pursue one of these traditions, he needs to establish a connection to the clan. Perhaps his family was enslaved during the Last War, and he earned his freedom through display of martial skill. Perhaps he can earn the friendship of a clan by finding Dhakaani artifacts and returning them to one of the chiefs!

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## About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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